CONFIDENTIAL

Dear Marcello,

It looks as if I won't have access to e-mail for a bit. But I promised to answer your question about my career with the U.S. government. The truth, strange as it may seem, is that I was an employee of the CIA for about a year in the mid 80s. I applied and was accepted while I was at Duke, then officially joined after a summer goofing around in Europe following graduation. I was in a training program that would eventually have put me overseas in a technically-oriented assignment, assisting case officers with certain projects.* Because of that I was under cover, and had to tell friends that I worked as a civilian in a very boring-sounding job at the Pentagon. When I traveled abroad on business, it was with an official passport.

The job was interesting and challenging in some respects but within six months or so I decided it wasn't how I wanted to spend my career. When you are undercover at the Agency you tend to develop an 'us v. them' attitude toward the rest of society-and the world-because you are constantly lying to protect your cover and all that goes with it. The satisfaction I got from the job, i.e. the sense of accomplishment and contribution to the Cold War effort, wasn't ~~enough~~ worth the psychological sacrifice. I considered and was even accepted into a much more sensitive, "sexy" training program for non-official-cover case officers, believing that I would be able to have much greater impact there. But at the last minute I decided not to join, and instead accepted an offer (I had already solicited) from a defense contractor in Virginia. (I was also moonlighting then as a member of a small startup company working on avionics technology—we were all Agency engineers.)

* I was not in the Directorate of Intelligence, as Wingfield has speculated.

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I left the Agency not just because I had good prospects elsewhere, ~~that~~ and because of the psychological sacrifice just mentioned but primarily because I'd become convinced that the people calling the shots were not the best and the brightest. More accurately, the "system" that ran things wasn't as good as it could have been. You are probably aware of this already, but NOC officers masquerade as engineers, salesmen, etc., not diplomats, and when they are arrested, the US gvt doesn't even admit knowing them. I'd already seen one case where it appeared that one of our guys was exposed by sloppy practices at high levels. On a much less significant scale, I'd also been the victim of bureaucratic foul-ups. It was the most difficult decision I'd ever made, but in the end I decided to leave the Agency and the prospect of a "James Bond life" behind. That was late 1986.

It turned out to be a good decision, despite the many pangs of regret I've felt over the years. Had I gone to a foreign country and spied under non-official-cover, I'd probably be dead or in jail now. The reason is that Aldrich Ames sold lists of undercover employees to the KGB, at a time when I would have been on one of those lists (because of my initial, low-grade cover assignment).

Although the Agency encouraged me to think about returning in the months after I left (they even deliberately delayed the transfer of my clearances to my new company) I never went back. My only contact with them has been to seek approval for a reversion to "overt" status — so I can legally admit I worked there. That was a couple of years ago.

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although I now put it on the CV I give to agents and publishers

Naturally I have not advertised the fact that I was once a CIA employee. I told Sandra Martin when she was my agent, and she spread it around (thanks, Sandra!). That is how George Wingfield heard, and, I guess, how you heard, although when the story began to spread I told a few other people.

Let me be clear about this: When I was at the Agency I knew nothing about government interest in the paranormal, and I had no interest in that subject myself. When I began to work as a journalist, I had zero contact with anyone whom I'd known while at the Agency. In other words, it would be inaccurate to say that I've ever made use of my brief Agency career in my journalistic work. As people like Hal Puthoff know, that is even particularly true for Remote Viewers: I was not even certain that the CIA had sponsored early RV work until I was well into the project. None of the characters in the book is a person I remember working with, and none of the current or former Agency employees I spoke to for the book was aware of my past employment there. Wingfields and Azadehdel's rants notwithstanding, my interest in crop circles and UFOs also was purely journalistic and personal.

But you can see how people might have got the wrong idea, had I made my association with the Agency known from the beginning of my interest in the paranormal. Now that interest is coming to an end — I hope!

Best wishes to you and your family for Christmas and the New Year.

J